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BLM BEGINS HORSETHIEF WORK

Crews began removing brush and timber earlier this month in the Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction Project area west of Roundup. The project area is in the wildland urban interface where homes and ranches are intermingled with timber and shrublands.

The Bureau of Land Management Billings Field Office issued a decision allowing the Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction in August 2003. BLM-administered lands in the 10,300-acre project area contain overstocked stands of ponderosa pine and juniper that are very receptive to ignition. The purpose of the project is to reduce fuels in order to change fire behavior to protect the town of Roundup, structures in the Horsethief subdivision, and natural resources.

A private contractor is harvesting and decking about 337 acres of merchantable timber which will be offered for sale at a later date. The work is being done first in an area near several residences to reduce threats to the structures. BLM crews will also be thinning timber and brush in the project area later this year.

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The Horsethief project was selected by Secretary of the Interior Norton as a pilot project for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) streamlining under President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative. One of the goals of the initiative is to improve regulatory processes to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires by restoring forest and rangeland health.

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